

Commentary on the Gospel for Tue, Nov 24th 2015

Memorial of Saint Andrew Dũng-Lạc, Priest, and Companions, Martyrs

As I reflected on today's readings I was reminded of a preacher who shouted from downtown street corners many years ago declaring the end was near, and calling for repentance. A slender African-American woman dressed in white from head to toe, she had a fierceness about her that disturbed me. Folks ridiculed her or laughed at her; I was embarrassed for her. Did she really believe the end was coming? Or that hollering scripture passages to passers-by would change them?

Today's first reading is an account of Daniel's interpretation of Nebuchadnezzar's dream. It is a reminder to us that God speaks to us through our dreams if we take time to understand the metaphors and images, but more importantly alerts us to this: kings and kingdoms, nations and civilizations will come and go, but there is a reign of God – a reach of God's mercy and justice - that will never be destroyed or delivered up to another.

Today I lament When? Where? How? I just finished reading a lengthy article in the morning paper. A horrific story of one young woman's brutal destruction – physically, emotionally, mentally – at the hands of others, how others watched and did nothing, and of the slow “justice” system. Where is the reach of God's mercy and justice?

In today's gospel reading, we hear Jesus speaking of the destruction of Jerusalem. Luke presents this discourse from Jesus as a future event, but at the time this was written it is quite likely Jerusalem had already been destroyed. Jesus states there will be wars – nation against nation – and there will be destruction – earthquakes, famines and plagues; but admonishes his listeners not to misinterpret; do not be deceived and do not be afraid. Throughout the Old Testament we hear of the wrath of God, the destructiveness of God's power – but it is always to bring about change and conversion, right? Why isn't Jesus more clear?

Today we honor St. Andrew Dũng-Lạc, a Vietnamese priest, and 116 other martyrs, although there were probably over 100,000 Vietnamese women and men who were tortured and executed from 1625 – 1886. In this group were 96 Vietnamese and 21 foreign missionaries....37 priests and 59 lay people....one a mother of six...76 were beheaded, 21 suffocated, 6 burnt alive, 5 mutilated and 9 eventually died after being tortured. We also commemorated the lives and deaths of the Salvadoran martyrs this past week.

I don't know how to pray about the continued martyrdom and destruction of good people, decade after decade, century after century when their only message is one of love and mercy and justice.

“As a Christian I do not believe in death without resurrection. If they kill me, I will be reborn in the Salvadoran people.” Salvadoran Archbishop Oscar Romero is reported to have said this mere days before his own martyrdom. I do believe that the reach of God's mercy and justice will never be destroyed or delivered up to another; that divine life will always spring up anew, somewhere, somehow within the human community and the mystery of this planet we call “home.”

Across the country there are many families preparing shelter, food, water and supplies for the

inevitable disasters that will come. Today I pray for the conviction and ferocity of the street corner preacher. “Repent! God is near!” Not a threat of punishment from an angry God, but as a promise of God’s mercy and justice – which is near when our hearts and minds are converted. It is only then that we can perceive it; it is only then that divine justice and compassion are made visible through our changed lives.

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